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Campbell delays Burrup gas plant decision

Federal Environment and Heritage Minister Senator Ian Campbell says he needs more time to consider plans for a proposed natural gas plant, which will sit on a culturally significant area.

The Burrup Peninsula in the north-west of Western Australia is home to some of the oldest and most important rock carvings, or petroglyphs, on Earth.

The area is also rich in resources and energy giant Woodside Petroleum wants to build an on-shore natural gas plant there.

Senator Campbell says natural gas cuts greenhouse emissions by up to 60 per cent and he does not want to hold up that export development.

But some of the rock art will be destroyed by the construction of the plant.

Senator Campbell says his interests lie in creating a balanced solution and he needs more time to find an appropriate course of action.

"I want to ensure we get future management of the province right," he said.

"I want to make sure that all of the major stakeholders, particularly the economic stakeholders are very happy with the process and we get, what I call a win-win-win.

"A win for the economy, a win for the environment in terms of greenhouse gas reductions, but also putting in a plan for the very very important and ancient rock art at the Burrup."

Archaeological survey

Senator Campbell says efforts to survey the area for national heritage have been implemented.

But he says only 30 per cent of the area has been looked at and more work needs to be done.

"We have spent a large amount of taxpayers money [to get] some of the best archaeologists available to [survey the area for cultural significance] but they have been impeded by lack of agreement from some of the local Indigenous interests," he said.

"So it is fair to say the thoroughness of the archaeological work is not up to the standard that I would expect for such an important area.

"It is an enormous area ... we are talking about a massive part of that province, a couple hundred of kilometres long by 50 or 60 kilometres wide."

Decision deadline

Senator Campbell says a decision will have to be made before surveying is completed.

"I think the archaeological work in that province will probably be going on for some hundreds of years I suspect, so you're not going to hold up a decision until it is thorough," he said.

"The main reason I'm delaying the decision-making process is that I want to ensure the economic development of the Burrup is in no way impeded by the heritage process of the heritage listing."

But Senator Campbell says the majority of rock art will be preserved .

"I'm absolutely certain at the end of this process that the management structure and the protection regime of that rock art will be world standard and much much better than anything that has existed in the past," he said.

"I'm absolutely certain that people will be able to go to the Burrup in five years, 10 years, 20 years, 30 years or 100 years and they will have a tremendous experience I am absolutely confident about that."